

What happened in the current WEC season

New Tracks New Cars New Calendar



#02 2021

A season with three firsts

The 2021 WEC season will live long in the memory for many of us, not just because of the on-track action but also thanks to the numerous changes that we have seen this year.

It's been a long time since two new race tracks were added to the calendar in a single season, and with the WEC calendar made more compact with six instead of eight rounds, it is all the more unusual.

The first was a fairly unknown circuit in southern Portugal, the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve. Situated near the city of Portimão, the circuit offered a different challenge to the WEC field – with plenty of ascents, descents and blind turns.

The 8 Hours of Portimão was originally intended as a one-off replacement for the 1000 Miles of Sebring, but the race proved popular in the paddock and there is a good chance it may stay on the calendar in 2022 or 2023.

The WEC's first appearance in Italy was equally impressive, thanks in no small part to the impressive backdrop. The Autodromo Nazionale di Monza is one of the most prestigious circuits in the world, with a history that goes back almost a century. It also shares a number of characteristics with the Circuit de la Sarthe in Le Mans, including its long straights and high-speed corners.

The teams viewed the inaugural 6 Hours of Monza as an ideal place to prepare for the upcoming 24 Hours of Le Mans, hence the presence of a number of one-off entries. The race also marked the first time spectators were able to return to the circuit as measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic were eased.

Ferrari were finally able to race at their home circuit, although Porsche somewhat spoiled the party by taking the win in GTE Pro.

The third new feature of the 2021 season comes from us here at WEC-Magazin. Frustrated by the challenge of following WEC races live for a German-speaking audience, we looked to create our own reliable solution for fans to keep track of all the action.

We decided to revive a medium that has almost been lost to the instant content delivery on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook: the live ticker! We carefully record all of the incidents and action in the race, and keep up to date with the positions in class – with an added bit of analysis here and there. It's no substitute for the live stream, but the WEC-Magazin live ticker is a great place to catch up on the action if you have not been able to watch the race start to finish.

So far the live ticker has only been available in German, but we will be looking to expand the service and provide an English version in the future (possibly for Le Mans).

We have noticed that the ticker has been very well received by our fans and we would like to thank you all for your feedback. We will continue to develop the concept and hope to improve it for every race. Suggestions, comments and criticism are always welcome – simply send us an email to tobias@wec-magazin.de.

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Toyota mark new Hypercar era with Spa victory

The new era of prototype racing began with a leap into the unknown at Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps. As the green flag was waved, the #7 car led from pole with a gaggle of LMP2 challenges fighting for positions close behind.

With the performance between Hypercar and LMP2 reduced significantly compared to the old LMP1 rules, the #22 United Autosports USA Oreca 07 was able to edge



ahead of the #8 Toyota on lap one. Order was soon restored, however, as the works Toyotas and the “grandfathered” Alpine LMP1 car established a lead of roughly 30 seconds by the end of the first hour.

By the first pit stops, the #8 Toyota had caught and overtaken the #7 machine and seemed to have a clear advantage on pace. Without the benefit of a hybrid system, the #36 Al-

pine pitted earlier than the Toyotas – as expected – but managed to remain with touching distance of the lead works cars. In fact, the Alpine led for a significant period of the race after the second round of pit stops.

The second round of pit stops proved costly for the #8 crew. A fuelling error caused #8 car to undercut its minimum refuelling time, which the stewards penalised

with a 35-second stop-and-hold penalty. This relegated the #8 machine back into third and gave Alpine and the sister Toyota the upper hand.

At the halfway stage, Alpine led the #7 Toyota by just two seconds, but hour four saw a major shake-up in the order. Firstly, there was contact between the #7 Toyota and the #91 Porsche at the Bus Stop Chicane, from which the lead car emerged apparently unscathed. Then, with 90 minutes of the race remaining, Kamui Kobayashi misjudged his braking point at the Brussels Hairpin and came to a halt in the gravel trap. Some smart marshalling freed the Japanese driver, but the chance of the win had disappeared.

The #8 car had a trouble-free race following its pit-stop foible. Some smart fuel-saving from Nakajima towards the end of the race meant that the new GR010 Hybrid was able to save a pit stop over the Alpine A480 – aided by a full-course yellow period in which cars run at 80 kph. Sébastien Buemi took the chequered flag with a comfortable one-minute advantage.

Porsche domination in GTE Pro

The #92 Porsche 911 RSR-19 of Kévin Estre and Neel Jani completed a dominating win in GTE Pro after a faultless performance. The Franco-Swiss pairing’s only setback was a slow puncture midway through the race. Fortunately, it came towards the end of a regular stint and so had little impact on their strategy.

The second works Porsche of Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz also had tyre trouble to contend with, with two punctures of their own – one as a result of the aforementioned contact with the #7 Toyota. The repair work cost the #91 crew a lap and they would ultimately finish fifth and last in GTE Pro.



Thirty seconds behind the winning Porsche was the #51 AF Corse Ferrari 488 GTE EVO of Alessandro Pier Guidi and James Calado. Third went to the sister AF Corse machine driven by Daniel Serra and Miguel Molina. Antonio Garcia and Oliver Gavin finished fourth and were unable to mark Corvette’s first European race with the new mid-engined C8.R and Gavin’s final race before retirement with a podium.

United Autosports USA class of the LMP2 field

The #22 United Autosports USA Oreca 07 dominated the LMP2 class in an impressive show of strength by the defending champions. Felipe Albuquerque, Phil Hanson and new silver driver Fabio Scherer looked imperious throughout the weekend, topping every single FP session, securing pole, winning the race and setting the fastest lap. So convincing was their performance that they managed to lap the entire LMP2 field except the two JOTA cars by the end of the race.

Second and third went the way of JOTA. However, a drive-through penalty in the final 15 minutes cost the #28 machine of Sean Galael, Stoffel Vandoorne and Tom Blomqvist second place. Instead, the #28 would finish third behind the #38 JOTA Oreca of Ricardo Gonzalez, Antonio Felix da Costa and Anthony Davidson.

GTE Am full of drama

There was plenty of drama and stories in the GTE Am category, as has become customary in the pro-am class. Victory went to the #83 AF Corse Ferrari of Niklas Nielsen, Alessandro Rovera and Francois Perrodo, as the defending champions in the class made a perfect start to 2021.

Second position went the way of the #33 TF Sport crew, who finished 40 seconds down the road and could well have been in contention for the win had Ben Keating not been punted off by a combination of LMP2 drivers Roman Rusinov and Juan-Pablo Montoya in the early stages of the race. Cetilar Racing took a much-deserved podium in their GTE Am debut and were clearly delighted as the podium champagne flowed.

To say that it was a weekend to forget for Porsche would be a massive understatement. Of the five 911 RSR-19s entered in the first round of season, only one would finish and three wouldn't even start the race! Project 1 bore the brunt of most of the bad luck, withdrawing both of its cars pre-race following accidents at Monday's Prologue and during qualifying on the Friday.

The #86 GR Racing Porsche failed to make it even to the grid after an accident on a warm-up lap. The most-heartbreaking fate befell the #77 Dempsey Proton Racing machine, which retired with just ten minutes of the race remaining.

Toyota one-two in Portimão as team orders mar finish

As in the first round Spa, the Hypercar class gave fans and viewers an exciting race as the raw pace of older #36 Alpine A480 went up against the frugality of the Toyota GR010 Hybrid. It was an age-old endurance racing match-up, playing out over eight hours of racing at the Algarve International Circuit as both teams attempted to make the most out of their relative advantages.

The #36 Alpine A480 began the race from the pole and quickly established an advantage over the pair of works Toyotas on account of its superior out-and-out pace. By the end of the first stint, Nicolas Lapierre in the #36 had eked out a 12-second lead ahead of the chasing hybrids.

The Toyotas tended to be able to run between six and seven laps longer, so the Alpine crew knew they would have to make at least one additional stop. Lapierre, pole-setter Mathieu Vaxiviere and André Negrão went about the task admirably and were aided by a safety car period at around the halfway stage, which bunched the field back up.



As the race progressed, it became clear that the #8 Toyota crew had been able to save fuel in the early stages of the race and would be able to run to the finish on one fewer pit stop. In the end, a late full-course yellow allowed the #7 car to complete its final "splash and dash" under yellow.

Team orders make for messy end

The #7 emerged just a handful of seconds down on the leading #8 and soon closed up. Then, some controversial team orders somewhat marred the finish of what had appeared to have been a fair fight. Sébastien Buemi in the #8 was asked to let José Maria López in the #7 through with just 20 minutes of the race remaining. A few laps later, López pulled aside himself to let Buemi retake the lead and run to the finish line.

Subsequent information from the team suggests that López was given a chance to overtake Buemi and pull away. With Buemi able to stay with the Argentine, the #7 was then told to pull aside and let the #8 retake the lead. It was an unfortunate, unnecessary and ignominious end to what had been a topsy-turvy, hard-fought battle.

Glickenhau Racing marked their first ever appearance in the FIA World Endurance Championship but it was a day of learning for the US-entered Hypercar. Ryan Briscoe damaged the car attempting to overtake lapped traffic, resulting in a replacement clutch having to be fitted. The crew got the car back out and the #709 completed the race and took home some valuable data ahead of Glickenhau's first tilt at Le Mans in August.

JOTA one-two in LMP2

JOTA scored a memorable one-two finish in the LMP2 class after a rollercoaster ride of a race. The British team held a clear advantage throughout the weekend and were able to convert their strong pace into race victory.

Things didn't go entirely to plan though, as Tom Blomqvist in the #28 car was tipped into a spin by the #38 car in the second corner of the first lap. This incident relegated the pole-sitting machine to the back of the field and kicked off an excellent recovery drive for Blomqvist, Sean Galael and Stoffel Vandoorne.

Indeed, it looked like the #28 crew had done enough for the win, if not for a final-stint push by Antonio Felix da Costa in the #38 machine. The Portuguese driver caught and passed the #28 car with a daring manoeuvre into turn 6 with just 10 minutes of the race remaining, providing an intriguing counterpoint to the team orders in the Hypercar class. Rounding out the top three in LMP2 was the #22 United Autosports USA Oreca, which had started on pole.



Ferrari dominant in GTE Pro and Am

After another blinding qualifying by Porsche in GTE Pro, it appeared for all intents and purposes that the German squad would secure a routine victory come race day. However, over full race distance the tides turned completely as Ferrari and AF Corse completed a relatively simple one-two result.

The key to success appeared to be by tyre wear, or lack of it in Ferrari's case. Porsche still appeared to enjoy an advantage on pace, but over the course of the stint the Ferraris were able to take much better care of their rear rubber. Ultimately the win went to the #51 AF Corse crew of James Calado and Alessandro Pier Guidi, who finished 25 seconds ahead of the sister #52 car and 45 seconds up the road from the #92 Porsche.

Ferrari were victorious in GTE Am too, as Cetilar Racing recorded their first ever class win in the WEC. The Italian squad were made to fight for it, however, as the #56 Project 1 Porsche finished just 5 seconds down the road following the late-race safety car period. Third was another Ferrari, the #54 AF Corse entry.

Toyota prevail in spectacular Monza WEC debut

Toyota Gazoo Racing had dominated qualifying and free practice but the Japanese manufacturer's rivals in the Hypercar class showed excellent race pace, making for an exciting six hours that went right down to the wire.

The pair of works hybrids made good starts to the race from the front row and quickly established a solid lead in the first stint. However, after 90 minutes of racing the #8 machine of Brendon Hartley, Sébastien Buemi and Kazuki Nakajima slowed on track and was forced to pit. The technical issue proved costly and cost the championship-leaders some 15 laps, effectively dashing any hopes of a podium finish.

At the halfway stage, the #7 Toyota held a relatively comfortable 25-second lead, but the chasing #36 Alpine and #709 Glickenhaus always remained within striking distance were the leader's pace to slip. Indeed, in the second half of the race the #36 and #709 cars were regularly quicker than the lead Toyota and were slowly cutting the gap to the front.

Drama then befell the #7 car, which came to a standstill halfway around the circuit and lost around a minute recycling the systems. This incident allowed Romain Dumas in the #709 Glickenhaus to assume the lead of the race after an outstanding stint for the Frenchman behind the wheel of the 007-LMH.

However, joy in the Glickenhaus pit was short-lived, as Dumas pitted shortly afterwards also for brake-related issues. Wear on the fronts was higher than the team had envisioned, so team principal James Glickenhaus opted for a full change for safety reasons. The #709 emerged from the extended pit stop around 4 laps down on the lead pair and ultimately finished fourth.

At the head of the race, the issues for the #7 car had brought the #36 machine right back into contention. The Toyota pitted with around one hour of the race remaining and emerged just 15 seconds behind, with both cars requiring one more stop and setting the race up for an exciting finale.

However, a full-course yellow period for urgent track repairs and debris removal gave the #7 car the cushion it needed to secure its first victory of the season. The #36 Alpine finished in a comfortable second, and the French crew will likely be buoyed by its consistent performance and the technical issues befalling the Hypercars.



The #709 Glickenhaus managed to finish the race in fourth, with the lead LMP2 car of United Autosports snapping up the final spot on the overall podium. Despite missing out on a podium, the Monza WEC weekend was still full of positives for the US squad. The Glickenhaus 007-LMH performed on par with the other Hypercars and the team will take plenty of encouragement ahead of next month's showdown at Le Mans.

Porsche edge Ferrari in tight GTE Pro battle

GTE Pro provided the Porsche-Ferrari battle everyone was expecting. Barely anything had separated the pair of works teams across the weekend, and so it continued into race day.

The #92 Porsche and the #51 Ferrari, who have been almost inseparable all season, delivered the next round of their head-to-head fight at Ferrari's home circuit. Porsche led for much of the race, aside for a short period when James Calado in the Ferrari outmuscled Neel Jani at a restart following a safety car period.

As the minutes ticked away, Alessandro Pier Guidi looked to be closing in on the Porsche to pass for the class win. However, the #51 machine had to pit for a splash of fuel with just two minutes of the race remaining, gifting the win to Porsche.

United Autosports with class win and overall podium

United Autosports enjoyed a successful weekend at Monza with the #22 winning the class by a minute ahead of the #31 Team WRT Oreca and the #29 Racing Team Nederland machine. It was only the third time an

LMP2 machine had finished on the overall podium – the other two being the 2012 Sebring 12 Hours and the 2017 24 Hours of Le Mans.

Polish team Inter Europol Competition looked on course for their maiden class podium for most of the race, but had to settle for their best-ever finish in the LMP2 class of fourth. It was a day to forget for championship leaders JOTA: Multiple issues befell the #38 car and the #28 could only finish fifth, surrendering its championship lead to United Autosports.

Action galore in GTE Am

As WEC fans will have come accustomed to, there was plenty of door-banging racing and on-track action in the GTE Am category. Victory went to the #83 AF Corse crew after a fine recovery drive. Starting from the back of the field following a qualifying infringement, François Perrodo, Nicklas Nielsen and Alessio Rovera put together a flawless performance to win by 44 seconds.

There was final lap drama in the fight for second and third, as the #98 Aston Martin passed the #777 Aston Martin with just minutes remaining. Both teams will be more than happy with their first podiums of the season.

Championship leaders Cetilar Racing in the #47 Ferrari had a tough race following an accident in the opening stages. The all-Italian crew could only finish 14th in class, three laps down on the leaders.

Text - David Tunnicliffe
Image United Autosports - Piero Lonardo
Other Images - Walter Schruff / Ton Kerdijk

Point of View

Our favourite pictures so far

In the 2021 season, our photographers Ton and Walter are once again passionately on site at the tracks to capture the race. Their favourite pictures so far can be found here at a glance.



The new Peugeot 9X8

After months of waiting, one of the most long-awaited entrants to the FIA World Endurance Championship's new Hypercar class is finally here. Peugeot has unveiled its challenger for World Championship and Le Mans glory: the Peugeot 9X8 hypercar.

The 9X8 is an all-wheel-drive hybrid hypercar delivering 680 hp (500 kW) from the rear axle through a twin-turbo V6 engine and a further 200 kW through the front wheels. It is due to compete in the WEC from the 2022 season.

The two-car entry for the new season will feature the likes of Paul di Resta and Kevin Magnussen and marks Peugeot's return to top-class prototype racing after a decade-long absence.

Radical new design

In terms of the overall design, the Peugeot 9X8 hypercar marks a significant departure from the LMP1 era with styling cues and design elements taken directly from the related road car, the 508 Peugeot Sport.

"The greater flexibility allowed by the sport's new technical rules regarding aerodynamics permits radical new thinking that favours the emergence of innovative cars, with scope for the design teams to make an even bigger contribution," wrote Peugeot Sport in its press release.

"Peugeot's engineers and designers effectively took advantage of this opportunity to invent new creative processes and break away from established codes to produce a Hypercar of a completely new genre."



Countless teaser videos and carefully concealed imagery hinted that the French carmaker had designed something special, but the new Hypercar machine appears to have surprised even the most imaginative fans.

Arguably the most prominent feature of the new racing car isn't a feature at all, it's the lack of one. The Peugeot 9X8 has no rear wing.

"The absence of a rear wing on the PEUGEOT 9X8 is a major innovative step," says [Peugeot parent company] Stellantis' Motorsport Director Jean-Marc Finot. "We have achieved a degree of aerodynamic efficiency that allows us to do away with this feature."

The car is set to be tested extensively over the remainder of the year before its competitive debut in early 2022.

Text - David Tunnicliffe
Images - Peugeot Motorsport

Predictability is also lacking at the end

With the world still in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic, it will take some time before things return to normal on the WEC calendar. The challenges still faced in global motorsport came to the fore once again, as the WEC has been forced to re-jig its plans one final time.

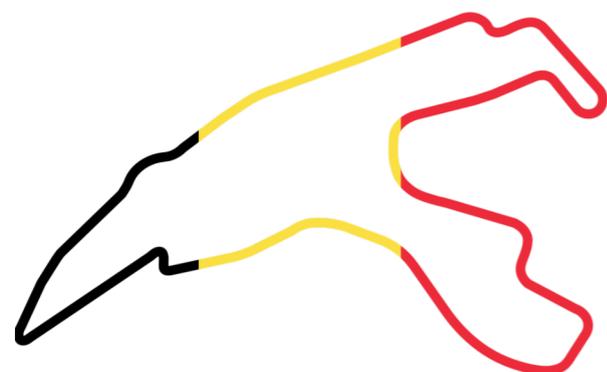
The original plan was to race in Japan for the 6 Hours of Fuji in September, around six weeks after the 24 Hours of Le Mans. However, the series organisers opted to cancel the round in the Far East for fear of amplifying

infection rates in the Land of the Rising Sun.

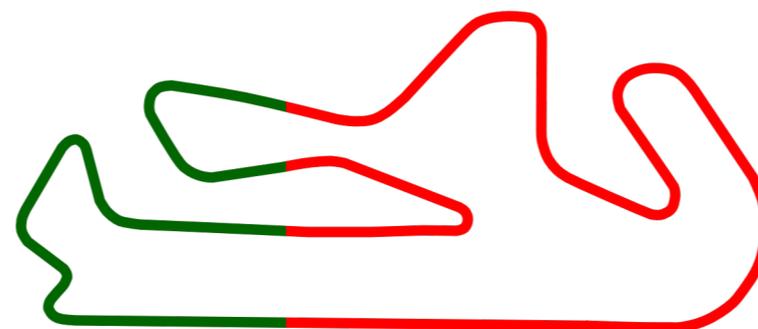
Instead, the WEC has decided to organise its final two races of the season in as “Covid-safe” a manner as possible, with a double-header in Bahrain.

After Le Mans, the season will take a late summer break before reconvening on 30th October for the 6 Hours of Bahrain. The season finale will then take place one week later on 6 November, with both races using the customary circuit layout.

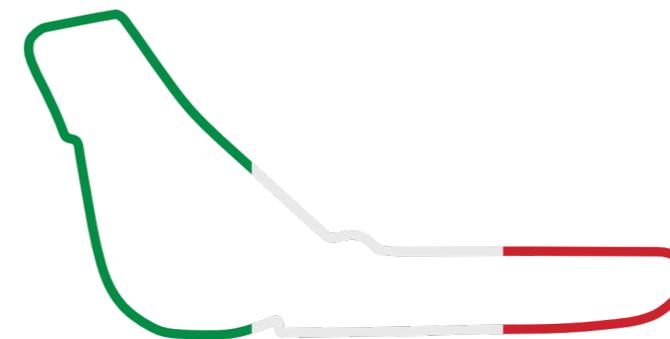
Text - David Tunnicliffe
Graphics - David Tunnicliffe / Tobias Krause



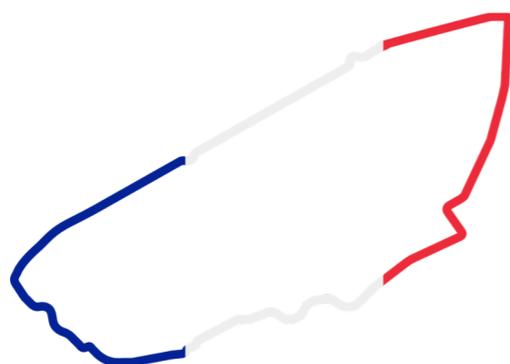
6 Hours of Spa
01/05/2021



8 Hours of Portimão
13/06/2021



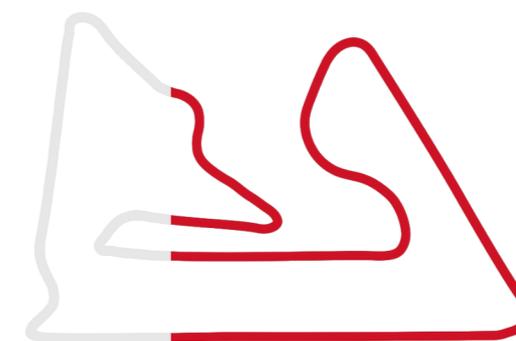
6 Hours of Monza
18/07/2021



24 Hours of Le Mans
21 - 22/08/2021



6 Hours of Bahrain
30/10/2021



8 Hours of Bahrain
06/11/2021

The current standings

Le Mans marks the halfway point of the 2021 WEC season, and the battle for championship glory is in full swing. As you can see, some of the title battles are extremely tight.

Things will be all the more interesting at Le Mans, as double points will be on offer. More points will also be available at the final round of the season at the 8 Hours of Bahrian.

A full run-down of all of the latest standings is [available in the Standings section of our website](#).

Text - David Tunnicliffe
Statistics - David Tunnicliffe

Hypercar Drivers' Championship			
	Driver	Team	Points
1.	B. Hartley	Toyota Gazoo Racing	75
1.	S. Buemi	Toyota Gazoo Racing	75
1.	K. Nakajima	Toyota Gazoo Racing	75
2.	M. Conway	Toyota Gazoo Racing	69
2.	K. Kobayashi	Toyota Gazoo Racing	69
2.	J. M. López	Toyota Gazoo Racing	69
3.	A. Negrão	Alpine ELF Matmut	60
3.	N. Lapierre	Alpine ELF Matmut	60
3.	M. Vaxiviere	Alpine ELF Matmut	60

Hypercar Manufacturers' Championship			
	Manufacturer	Car	Points
1.	Toyota Gazoo Racing	Toyota TS050 Hybrid	90
2.	Alpine Elf Matmut	Alpine A480 – Gibson	64
3.	Glickenhaus Racing	Glickenhaus 007 LMH	33

LMGTE Drivers' Championship			
	Driver	Team	Points
1.	K. Estre	Porsche GT Team	76
1.	N. Jani	Porsche GT Team	76
2.	A. Pier Guidi	AF Corse	74
2.	J. Calado	AF Corse	74
3.	D. Serra	AF Corse	54
3.	M. Molina	AF Corse	54

LMGTE Manufacturers' Championship			
	Manufacturer	Car	Points
1.	Ferrari	Ferrari 488 GTE EVO	128
2.	Porsche	Porsche 911 RSR-19	121

LMP2 Drivers' Championship			
	Driver	Team	Points
1.	P. Hanson	United Autosports USA	74
1.	F. Albuquerque	United Autosports USA	74
2.	R. Gonzalez	JOTA	56
2.	A. Davidson	JOTA	56
2.	A. da Costa	JOTA	56
3.	T. Blomqvist	JOTA	53
3.	S. Vandoorne	JOTA	53
3.	S. Galael	JOTA	53

LMP2 Teams' Championship			
	Team	Car	Points
1.	United Autosports USA	Oreca 07 – Gibson	74
2.	JOTA #38	Oreca 07 – Gibson	56
3.	JOTA #28	Oreca 07 – Gibson	53

LMGTE-AM Drivers' Championship			
	Driver	Team	Points
1.	R. Lacorte	Cetilar Racing	54
1.	G. Sernagiotto	Cetilar Racing	54
1.	A. Fuoco	Cetilar Racing	54
2.	F. Perrodo	AF Corse	52
2.	N. Nielsen	AF Corse	52
2.	A. Rovera	AF Corse	52
3.	P. Dalla Lana	Aston Martin Racing	44
3.	A. Farfus	Aston Martin Racing	44
3.	M. Gomes	Aston Martin Racing	44

LMGTE-AM Teams' Championship			
	Team	Car	Points
1.	Cetilar Racing	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	54
2.	AF Corse #83	Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	52
3.	Aston Martin Racing	Aston Martin Vantage AMR	44